

# Committee On Oversight & Government Reform

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## Just Days Before HealthCare.gov Launch, E-mail Chain Shows White House and HHS Prepping for Possible Failure

November 20, 2013

A new e-mail chain released by the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Darrell Issa, R-Calif., states that just days prior to HealthCare.gov's launch, a top HealthCare.gov official discussed White House fears about the website being unavailable and accurately predicted media outlets publicizing a now well-known error message that appears when the website is down.

On September 25, 2013, Henry Chao, CMS Deputy Chief Information Officer, sent an email to CMS staff and contractors stating, "When Todd Park and Marilyn [Tavener] was here yesterday one of the things Todd conveyed was this fear the WH has about hc.gov being unavailable." Todd Park is the White House Chief Technology Officer; Marilyn Tavener is the Administrator for CMS.

"Todd does have a good point and I think we should have a more comprehensive answer as to how we will ensure high availability," Chao continued.

Later in the same email, Chao writes, "Jon and Ketan – can you think about a better way to convey to the public when the site is not available? I am picturing in my mind all the major print and online publications taking screenshots of what is below and just ramping up the hyperbole about hc.gov not functional."

He included a picture of an error message which says, "The System is down at the moment." Just a few days later, visitors to HealthCare.gov were greeted by that same image when the site crashed immediately after its launch.

Last week, Chao and Park testified before the Committee. When asked if HealthCare.gov would be fixed by November 30th, Park stated only that the team tasked with fixing the site is working hard.

You can read the email chain released today [here](#).

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